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ABSTRACT

The technological advances that have occurred in recent decades have resulted in substantial changes in the nature and structure of occupations and industries. Career development is now being recognized as a lifelong process. Individualized career plans (ICPs) or personal plans of action are becoming important instruments for counselors and others to use in helping their students and/or clients meet their changing goals, interests, and needs in today's rapidly changing society. An ICP can be both a tool and a procedure that individuals can use by themselves or with others to implement and monitor their own career development. Rather than a rigid track, a good ICP can provide a renewed focus for an individual's life. Good ICPs are comprehensive, developmental, person centered, and competency based. It has been suggested that the various life roles be used to provide the main section of a plan and that each plan contain a section in which individuals can project their own future career growth. These life roles include the following: worker, consumer/citizen, learner, and family member roles. The ICP model lends itself well to various formats and modifications, it can be targeted in many directions, and it is adaptable for use at all levels of schooling as well as in employment and training agencies. ICPs can also be developed to assist disabled students and working women. The career passport, which is a variation of the ICP model, presents a systematic process for developing an experience-based resume that documents nonwork as well as work experiences and details the skills, attitudes, and knowledge gained through these experiences. (MN)



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# INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER PLAN MODELS

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Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

# INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER PLAN MODELS

### Why Do We Need Individualized Career Plans?

During the past several decades, most aspects of our society have become more and more complex. Technological advances, for example, have resulted in substantial changes in the nature and structure of occupations and industries. These changes have affected many of the ways in which we approach career planning and decision making. For example, new techniques in individual and group counseling, assessment procedures, and career resources increasingly are being used. Most important, career development is now being recognized as a lifelong process. Personal plans of action—individualized career *development* plans—are becoming important instruments that counselors and others are using to help their students and/or clients (both youth and adults) meet their changing goals, interests, and needs in this fast-paced, rapidly changing society.

According to Gysbers (1983), an individualized career plan (ICP) can be both a tool and a procedure that people either use by themselves or with others to implement and monitor their career development. As a tool, the plan provides a place to record aptitudes, interests, values, and competencies and to identify those they may wish to acquire or further develop; as a procedure, the plan provides a guide through which individuals use the past and the present to look to the future. Rather than a rigid track, a good plan can provide a renewed focus for one's life.

This **ERIC Digest** identifies the basic characteristics of an ICP, describes its conceptual and physical contents, and lists specific examples of its use. Finally, the career passport is examined as a form of ICP.

### Essential Elements of an Individualized Career Plan

At least four basic characteristics of individualized career plans have been identified:

1. **Comprehensive.** An ICP is broad-based, with opportunities for individuals to define goals and identify competencies, aptitudes, interests, and values. Moreover, it is sufficiently broad to include such multilife roles as workers, consumers/citizens, learners, family members, and unique individuals.

2. **Developmental.** An ICP is ongoing; it is never completed. Indeed, it is designed to be used throughout the entire life span. Since it contains elements that respond to the demands of different roles and stages, it is not in a form that is completed only once. Rather, it is in a form that can be modified as new growth is experienced.

3. **Person-centered.** The plan belongs to the individual using it. Although the plan itself may be stored or kept for convenience as a part of an institution or agency, it remains the property of the person who has developed it. Moreover, although the plan may reflect the input of many persons (for example, teachers, counselors, agency staff, and business or industry personnel), it always remains person-centered and person-directed.

4. **Competency-based.** Each of these elements focuses on competencies, that is, on knowledge, skills, and attitudes individuals acquire at work, in school, on the job, or in the community. The plan, therefore, includes a component that identifies and records current competencies as well as a component that provides an indication of potential additional competencies to which an individual may aspire.

### What Does an ICP Look Like?

Gysbers (1983) provided a logical structure on which to build. He suggested, for example, that the various life roles be used to provide the main section of a plan and that each plan contain a section in which individuals can project their future career growth. The latter section would provide the opportunity both to analyze and synthesize information and insights in the life role sections and to generalize them to present and future actions.

The remaining sections of the plan might focus on the activities involved in the individual's varied life roles. In addition, the plan contains a section generically titled "career growth development." This section provides room for analyzing, synthesizing, and applying information gathered in the life role sections; it also provides space in which an individual records his or her action steps and progress toward the completion of a goal.

According to Gysbers, the life roles include the following:

**Worker roles.** Individuals record information about the competencies they possess as workers or potential workers. Such a listing includes interest information and aptitude data as well as tasks performed around the home or schools or on jobs they have held.

**Consumer/citizen roles.** Individuals list the community resources that they have used and/or that are available for use. Depending on the age of the person involved, information is on such consumer/citizen concerns as the purchase and maintenance of housing, investment of money, and the like.

**Learner roles.** Individuals record their educational experiences and achievements. Official transcripts, acquired competencies, informal learning experiences, and extracurricular activities are examples of the type of information included.

**Family member roles.** Individuals record information about family background, family members or relatives, and possible family crises and what was done to handle them. Short anecdotes about such occurrences sometimes are included.

An individualized career plan also includes *career growth action* steps, that is, the design provides room for individuals to think about the information they have recorded along with potential next steps. This normally is the place where short-range and long-range goals are recorded and monitored, where behavioral "contracts" with oneself or others are kept, where possible barriers to goal completion are identified, and where supportive individuals or groups are noted.

### Specific Examples of ICPs

The individualized career plan lends itself well to various formats and modifications, it can be targeted in many directions, and it is adaptable for use at all levels of schooling as well as in employment and training agencies. Its flexibility is illustrated in



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the following brief sampler of plans and projects that have been developed over the past decade. Note the variations in target audiences, adaptability, and scope of the concept in the following examples:

- Childers (1983) developed a booklet for use in workshops on career decision making and planning as part of a series of three career orientation self-development units designed ultimately for use **at the junior high school level.**
- Wilson and his colleagues (1979) targeted their plan toward a specific area, namely, an allied health professions counseling model **at the secondary school level.**
- Hafer (1982) concentrated on creating a format for a career planning and development program suitable for use **at 2-year postsecondary institutions.**
- Smith, Berenson, and Smith (1981) developed a planning guide and handbook **for students with disabilities** that is available in Braille, large print, and tape cassette.
- Aanstad and Borders (1980) described a course, "Life-work Planning," designed **to help working women** evaluate their current job status and plan career changes commensurate with long-range life goals.
- Keller, Mayfield, and Piotrowski (1983) constructed **a 13-step approach** to career and life planning that includes such specific features of an ICP as developing a career personality profile, gathering specific labor market information, and preparing a resume.

### Career Passport

Charner and Bhaerman (1986) discussed the concept of the "career passport" and explored how passports are used. The career passport is in effect a form of an individualized career development plan. The career passport presents a systematic process for developing an experience-based resume that documents nonwork as well as work experiences and details the skills, attitudes, and knowledge gained through these experiences. The process results in a formal document in which students or clients present the many marketable skills they have developed through their life experiences.

The steps for completing a career passport are (1) describe (work experience, hobbies, activities, home responsibilities), (2) translate (into skills, knowledge, attitudes, competencies, abilities, and interests), (3) present (in a career passport, experience report, or resume), and (4) use (for job applications and interviews, self-analysis, career exploration, counseling and advising, and education, career, and life planning). The feedback loop between (4) and (1) suggests that the process is continuous, with updating and modifications occurring regularly.

The explicit description of the nature of one's experiences and activities is critical and should reflect a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities an individual has had. It is equally critical to translate these experiences into their component competencies. The translation process requires users to explore their experiences deeply and to recognize the skills, attitudes, knowledge, and competencies they have earned. This process of exploration and recognition requires the assistance of a leader, who may be a teacher or counselor.

As a result, the users of a career passport discover that their experiences have taught them many things—for example, responsibility; ways to work cooperatively with others; specific skills such as recordkeeping, selling, handling money, and so on. They also recognize activities they enjoy doing (as well as ones they dislike), areas of interest they wish to explore, and attitudes they have developed. Furthermore, the process of translating experiences into skills, attitudes, and knowledge enables them to learn more about their marketability. Although some of the younger students may not have many years of experience, they learn that they do have much to offer.

Just as a passport for foreign travel allows a person to enter another country, the career passport enables individuals to enter employment or further education and training programs. In many ways, it is the key that opens doors, truly a passport to the future.

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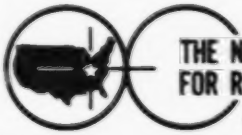


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